Dual-fuel glider kits are a relatively new alternative for fleets looking to tap into the benefits of natural gas but at a lesser cost than buying a new, dedicated NG vehicle.

A glider is a new truck without some powertrain components. Shops in the field add rebuilt or remanufactured engines, transmissions, and rear axles. Freightliner, which makes most glider kits, also can add remanufactured engines at the factory and sometimes remanufactured axles. Engines are usually straight diesels, but can be fitted with dual-fuel systems.

A dual-fuel setup costs $30,000 to $35,000, about half what most new dedicated natural gas systems cost on a new truck. Dual-fuel systems let customers use cheap natural gas along with diesel, and makes the exhaust about 30% cleaner than "pre-emission" diesels. Because the engines can switch back to all-diesel at any time, the still-spotty natural gas fueling infrastructure is less of a problem.

Last year two companies announced dual-fuel glider kits. EcoDual is partnering with Hunter Truck Sales, a Peterbilt dealer with 15 locations throughout Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New York and West Virginia. Hunter will provide custom-configured Peterbilt gliders with EcoDual’s platform, the Max/ SR Dual Fuel System.

American Power Group teamed up with the WheelTime network of dealers and repair shops to add APG’s V5000 Turbocharged Natural Gas Dual-Fuel System to gliders from Freightliner.

One WheelTime member is Ervin Equipment in Shreveport, La., where Ken Eggis is director of business development. He says the APG system allows carrying natural gas on the truck in compressed or liquefied form. Dual-fuel equipment, including special gas tanks, pumps and engine parts, are installed as part of the glider assembly process.

“We are slated to build nearly 1,000 glider trucks this year,” Eggis says, “and fully 20% will be dual-fuel.”

Nevertheless, many truck operators still know little about gliders and are suspicious of the idea. Those who have heard about them think of gliders in the traditional sense — a means to rebuild a wrecked truck that has a good powertrain. That’s how gliders originated, but some fleets now substitute gliders for normal new or used trucks.

To help educate fleets about dual-fuel gliders, another WheelTime member, Penn Commercial Vehicle Solutions of Glenmore, Pa., has assembled a demonstrator tractor featuring APG dual-fuel equipment and a Webasto diesel-fueled heater. It will show the advantages of the glider kits that run

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Dual-fuel systems can store gas in compressed or liquefied form. This is an LNG tank being installed by technicians at another WheelTime member, Smith Power in Salt Lake City.

mainly on natural gas, combined with a heater that warms engine coolant for quick starts in cold weather.

The Freightliner Coronado tractor will allow potential customers to try out the concepts in real-world situations before they purchase, said Rick Roger, Penn's CEO.

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- Ken Eggert, Ervin Equipment approved by California's Air Resources Board and verified by the Environmental Protection Agency's SmartWay program as a fuel saver. It can eliminate cold starts and quickly warm a cab's interior without idling the engine, and gets the vehicle on the road quickly. The heater's SmarTemp Control can be programmed to heat automatically at scheduled times, and temperatures can be easily adjusted.

The cost for a Penn-APG dual-fuel glider with Webasto coolant heater and SmarTemp Control is comparable to that of a new tractor that runs only on relatively expensive diesel fuel, Roger says.

California investing in fuel cells

The California Energy Commission is seeking proposals to spend $100 million starting in 2015 to build out fueling stations and other infrastructure to support hydrogen fuel-cell vehicles.

The program provides funding for projects that expand hydrogen fueling infrastructure, including building fueling stations; improving alternative vehicle technologies; and retrofitting medium- and heavy-duty vehicle technologies.

Epes adding natural gas

After two and a half years of researching natural gas, Greensboro, N.C.-based Epes Transport launched its first tractor powered completely by compressed natural gas.

Initially, Epes will run CNG tractors only in North Carolina. In February, Epes will add liquid natural gas-fueled tractors to its operating lanes in Georgia and Florida.

AmpCNG to build public-access CNG station

AmpCNG (formerly known as LAM America) announced that it has signed a deal with Ventur Logistics to build CNG fueling infrastructure at an existing gasoline station in Lafayette, Ind.

The public station will serve the Subaru of Indiana Automotive plant as the anchor tenant, and will provide as much as 2.5 million diesel gallon equivalents of CNG each year to heavy-duty truck fleets operating primarily on I-65.

The ultra fast-fill CNG station will have 2 dual hose dispensers, 4 lanes, 4 hoses, and is expected to be fully operational by the end of March, 2014.

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